



The Falklands Campaign: The Lessons

*Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence
by Command of Her Majesty
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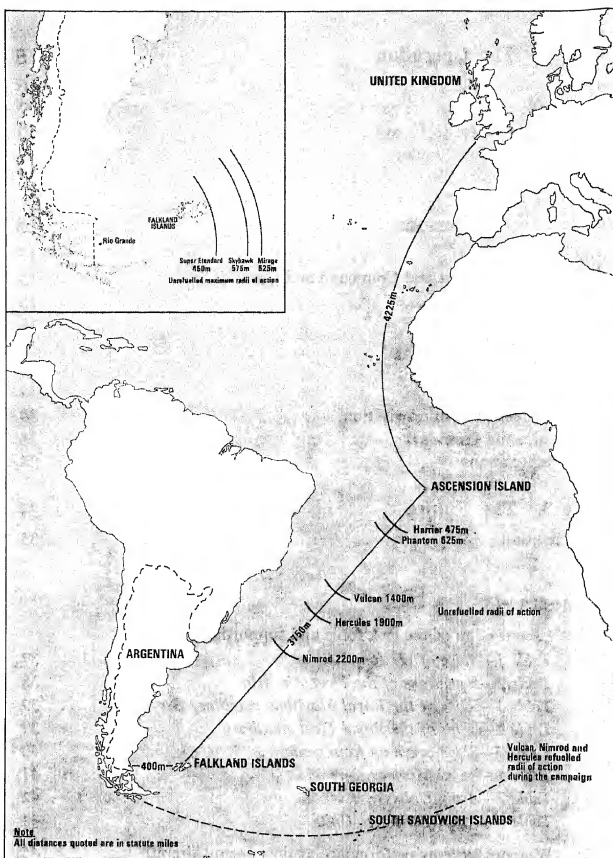
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Part 1

The Operation

101. On 2 April 1982 in an act of unprovoked aggression against British sovereign territory and British people Argentine forces invaded the Falkland Islands. The next day they invaded South Georgia. These invasions were launched despite urgent calls upon the Argentine Government from the President of the USA, the President of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and the Secretary General of the UN to desist from military action. The invasion was immediately condemned by the UN Security Council in its Resolution 502. That Resolution went on to call for an immediate withdrawal of the Argentine forces occupying the Falkland Islands, and for a peaceful settlement of the dispute.

102. The Government made clear from the first its willingness to accept and abide by Resolution 502. We engaged in intense and prolonged diplomatic activity in pursuit of a peaceful solution. But we could not depend upon it. We therefore took military steps intended to put pressure on Argentina to withdraw and to make possible our repossession of the Islands by force if that should ultimately prove necessary. Three days after the invasion HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible* left the United Kingdom to head what was to become the largest task force in recent history.

103. While diplomatic efforts continued the net was gradually drawn more tightly around the Argentine garrison on the Falklands. On 12 April we imposed a maritime exclusion zone of 200 miles around the Falklands against Argentine naval ships. On 23 April we warned that any approach by Argentine forces which could amount to a threat to interfere with the mission of British forces in the South Atlantic would be dealt with appropriately. On 25 April the task force repossessed South Georgia. The recapture of South Georgia dealt a psychological blow to the Argentine Government and provided clear evidence of the United Kingdom's resolve and willingness to resort to military action if all other courses were closed. It also gave the task force an anchorage in the South Atlantic. On 29 April we warned that all Argentine vessels shadowing the task force would be liable to attack. Despite this increasing military pressure, however, Argentina showed no signs of yielding on any points which could make negotiations possible.

104. We took further measures: on 30 April a total exclusion zone was imposed; on 1 May Port Stanley airfield was bombed; and on 7 May we warned that any Argentine warship or military aircraft over 12 miles from the Argentine coast would be treated as hostile. Even at this stage the way was open for the Argentine Government to accept a peaceful withdrawal of their troops. They declined, and it became clear that the Falklands would have to be retaken by force.

105. The first major landing on the Falkland Islands was made at San Carlos Water on the night of 20/21 May. In the actions which followed there were inevitably setbacks and casualties. Nevertheless, just over three weeks later Major General Moore, the Land Force Commander, accepted the surrender of General Menendez and his force at Port Stanley. It was by any standards a brilliant campaign, marked by exceptional logistic planning and improvisation, and carried through with outstanding skill and fortitude.

Deployment

106. To despatch a task force in such a short space of time was a remarkable achievement. It was the result of close cooperation between the Services, the Merchant Navy, the Royal Dockyards and commercial ports, the stores and transport organisations of the Ministry of Defence, and Industry. The task force had to be stocked and provisioned for at least three months at sea. Many of the merchant ships required extensive modification to prepare them for their new rôle. Eventually over 110 ships were deployed.¹ These included 44 warships; 22 from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA); and 45 merchant ships whose civilian crews were all volunteers.

107. The Falkland Islands lie 8,000 miles south-west of the United Kingdom and over 3,500 miles from Ascension Island; but only 400 miles from the Argentine mainland. The task force needed to be self-sufficient in food, water, fuel, ammunition and all the other military equipment it might require. Sound transport and logistic arrangements were vitally important. The ships of the RFA and the Merchant Navy and the Royal Air Force's transport aircraft were to be the task force's lifeline. Merchant shipping alone transported 9,000 personnel, 100,000 tons of freight and 95 aircraft to the South Atlantic. The supply chain carried 400,000 tons of fuel. RFA support ships transferred ammunition, dry cargo and fuel on some 1,200 occasions, in addition to more than 300 helicopter transfers. British forces established a joint forward operating base at Ascension Island. The Royal Air Force moved over 5,800 people and 6,600 tons of stores through Ascension Island in more than 600 sorties by Hercules and VC10 aircraft. Hercules aircraft also made some 40 supply drops to the task force, which entailed mid-air refuelling in round-trips lasting, in many cases, over 25 hours. This massive logistic effort enabled the warships and the aircraft of the task force to operate continuously without returning to distant bases for provisions.

108. In the space of seven weeks a task force of 28,000 men and over 100 ships had been assembled, sailed 8,000 miles, effectively neutralised the Argentine navy and fought off persistent and courageous attacks from combat aircraft which outnumbered its own by more than six to one. This in itself was no mean feat, but the task force then put ashore 10,000 men on a hostile coast while under threat of heavy air attack; fought several pitched battles against an entrenched and well supplied enemy who at all times outnumbered our forces; and brought them to surrender within three and a half weeks.

Note:

¹ *Details of the composition of the task force and supporting elements are given in Annex A.*

From South Georgia to San Carlos

109. The first action at sea took place off South Georgia when on 25 April the Argentine submarine *Santa Fé* was attacked on the surface some five miles from the main harbour at Grytviken. She was badly damaged and subsequently beached. The same day the Island was repossessed by Royal Marines and Special Forces (which comprise the Special Air Service (SAS) and the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) of the Royal Marines (RM)). On 1 May a Vulcan followed by Sea Harriers carried out their first attacks on the Falklands, and the first Argentine aircraft were shot down. The carrier group made a major demonstration of force, simulating an amphibious landing off Port Stanley which successfully drew the Argentines and revealed some of their defensive positions.

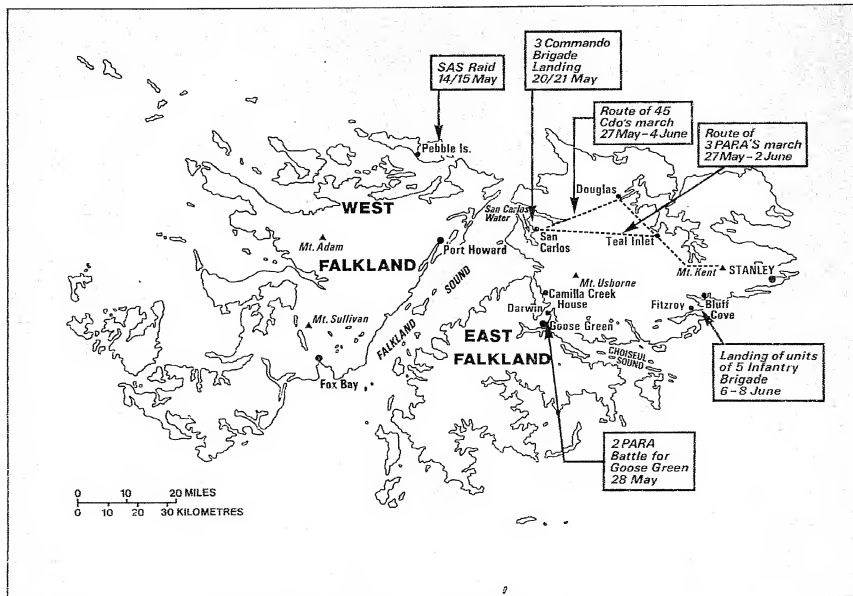
110. On 2 May HMS *Conqueror* detected the Argentine cruiser, *General Belgrano*, accompanied by two destroyers, sailing near to the total exclusion zone. Other Argentine ships were also thought to be probing our defences to the north of the zone. The *Belgrano*, and her escorts armed with Exocet missiles, posed a clear threat to the ships of the task force. She was therefore attacked and sunk by torpedoes. Thereafter major Argentine warships remained within 12 miles of the Argentine coast and took no further part in the Campaign. Argentine submarines continued to pose a serious threat, but no task force ships were successfully attacked.

111. The task force suffered its first major loss on 4 May. HMS *Sheffield*, while on forward radar picket duty, was hit by an Exocet missile launched from an Argentine Super Etendard aircraft. The missile hit fuel tanks amidships and serious fires started, which filled the central section of the ship with acrid smoke. After nearly four hours, with the fires increasing in intensity, the Captain gave orders to abandon ship. 20 members of her crew died.

112. By mid-May the task force had accomplished two of its main tasks: the movement of the troops safely to the South Atlantic and the establishment of control of the seas around the Islands. The rôle of the carriers, HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible*, was crucial at this and subsequent stages in providing air defence and the means of attacking enemy ships and ground positions, while their helicopters provided constant anti-submarine protection.

113. It was now necessary to put land forces ashore in sufficient strength to repossess the Islands. San Carlos was chosen as the site for the amphibious landing because it offered a good anchorage which could be protected against submarine attack and was an area known to be lightly defended by the enemy and difficult for him to reinforce rapidly. The low hills surrounding the inlet afforded good protection against the risk of Exocet attack. Men of the SAS and the SBS had for some time been reconnoitring East and West Falkland. Taking advantage of the intelligence they had gained, and under cover of a Naval bombardment, the SAS carried out a daring night raid on Pebble Island on 15 May. They destroyed 11 Argentine aircraft on the ground.

114. On 20 May the main amphibious force moved towards San Carlos Water, taking advantage of an overcast sky and poor visibility, and keeping strict radio silence. Meanwhile Special Forces mounted a series of diversionary raids at various points around East Falkland. Under cover of Naval gunfire,



men of the 3rd Commando Brigade RM (3 Cdo Bde), including the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, the Parachute Regiment (2 PARA and 3 PARA), embarked in their landing craft and headed for the shore. The landing was made over four beaches. Helicopters operated continuously, moving stores and helping to establish the beach-head. The operation achieved complete tactical surprise. 5,000 men were safely landed, and what little opposition there was quickly collapsed. British losses in this phase were two helicopters and their crews.

115. The next morning brought clear blue skies, but the landing force had won a vital few hours to establish defensive positions and begin to set up their Rapier fire units. At mid-day the Argentine air force began a series of fierce and protracted attacks against the beach-head and the ships supporting it.

116. The Sea Harriers on combat air patrol provided the outer layer of defence. The second layer was provided by a pair of ships known as the 'missile trap', positioned off the northern entrance to Falkland Sound. These were usually a Type 42 destroyer armed with Sea Dart and a Type 22 frigate with Sea Wolf. The next layer of defence, which became known as the 'gunline', was a group of three or four ships inside the entrance to the Sound using every gun and missile system they possessed to fight off the incoming Argentine aircraft. Finally within the anchorage itself (nicknamed 'bomb alley'), where there were often up to eight troop or stores ships at any one time, the small calibre guns and Sea Cat missiles from the assault ships, HMS *Intrepid* and HMS *Fearless*, together with Blowpipe missiles, machine guns and notably the Rapier fire units on shore provided the final layer of defence.

117. The Argentine pilots were courageous and persistent in their attacks and ships of the task force suffered loss and damage during the first few days after the landing. On the 'gunline' we lost HMS *Ardent* and HMS *Antelope* on 21 and 23 May; 24 men died. Six other ships were damaged between 21 and 24 May. But the Argentines paid a heavy price. On 21 May British forces shot down some 15 attacking aircraft. When attacks resumed on 23 May, 10 attacking aircraft were destroyed; on 24 May a further 18 were shot down.

118. On 25 May, Argentina's National Day, the Argentine air force made a major effort against the task force. HMS *Coventry* had been in the 'missile trap' to the north-west and had successfully controlled Sea Harriers and shot down three aircraft herself. She was attacked at low level by waves of Skyhawk aircraft which overwhelmed her defences. She capsized quickly. Survivors were rescued by HMS *Broadsword* and helicopters; 19 men died. Air attacks on the beach-head now became much less frequent and British forces were safely established ashore. The battle of San Carlos had been won.

119. Away from the beach-head air attacks continued. On 25 May the merchant ship, *Atlantic Conveyor*, which had delivered Harriers to the task force and was carrying much needed supplies, including helicopters, was north-east of the Falklands. Two Exocet missiles, launched from Argentine Super Etendard aircraft, hit the *Atlantic Conveyor*. The ship was set on fire. The fire spread rapidly and the ship was abandoned with the loss of 12 lives. A third attack on the task force by air-launched Exocet on 30 May was successfully countered.

From San Carlos to Fitzroy

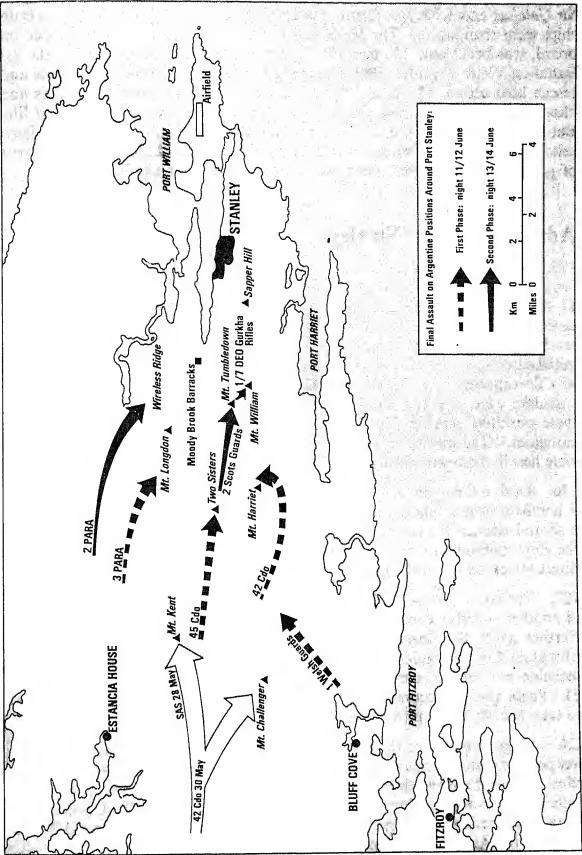
120. With the establishment of a firm bridge-head the advance on Port Stanley became the next objective. One threat to the flank of any attack on Port Stanley lay in the significant Argentine garrison and airfield at Darwin and Goose Green. 2 PARA was given the task of removing that danger and seeking an early victory. Overnight on 26/27 May one company of 2 PARA secured Camilla Creek House. After a 12 mile night approach march the rest of the battalion joined them and lay up for the day. An artillery troop of three 105mm light guns was flown into position to assist in the impending assault which started at 0200 hours on 28 May.

121. 2 PARA began by attacking Darwin, supported by Naval gunfire. The settlement was secured by mid-afternoon but the battalion was then faced with an advance on Goose Green, where the enemy were dug into strong defensive positions which had to be approached across the open ground of a narrow isthmus. Harrier aircraft were called in to attack the Argentine positions. The battalion was attacked by Pucara light aircraft from Goose Green, one of which was shot down by a Blowpipe missile. The battalion eventually overcame stiff resistance and pushed the enemy back into the settlement. A timely strike by the Harriers considerably helped the progress of the paratroopers and the next day the Argentine commander surrendered. British dead totalled 17.

122. Besides securing the flank the battle was significant for two reasons. First it gave us a chance to assess the fighting qualities of the enemy. Second, and more importantly, by their outstanding performance against a numerically superior enemy 2 PARA established a psychological ascendancy over the Argentines which our forces never lost.

123. In the course of a remarkable march of 50 miles over difficult terrain in inhospitable conditions, 45 Cdo and 3 PARA secured Douglas Settlement and Teal Inlet on 30 May. Meanwhile the SAS had established a patrol base forward on Mount Kent. 42 Cdo, making best use of the helicopter lift available, leap-frogged forward to secure Mount Kent and Mount Challenger, the western approaches to Port Stanley. On the same day Major General Moore assumed command of all land operations. The 5th Infantry Brigade (5 Bde) came ashore on 1 June.

124. The Land Force Commander decided to press on quickly with the advance on Port Stanley and to commit 5 Bde to the South. When it was discovered that the Argentines had evacuated Fitzroy settlement 2 PARA moved forward rapidly to secure the area, which was an important point in the advance on Stanley. The 1st Battalion 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles and the rest of 2 PARA advanced by sea and by air while the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards, the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards and logistic support units were transported to Fitzroy by sea. The loss of Chinook helicopters on the *Atlantic Conveyor* had effectively precluded the option of air-lifting the bulk of 5 Bde. Passage by sea was therefore the only way to move forward quickly, maintaining the impetus of the advance and minimising the risk of Argentine counter-attack. On the nights 5/6 and 6/7 June the Scots Guards and elements of the Welsh Guards were successfully moved by HMS *Intrepid* and HMS *Fearless*.



The deployment of the balance of the Welsh Guards was thwarted by appalling weather. On the night 7/8 June RFA *Sir Galahad* was despatched with support units and the remaining Welsh Guards. On 8 June the cloud lifted and, before the final elements had been disembarked from the landing ships, RFA *Sir Galahad* and RFA *Sir Tristram* were hit by an air strike at Fitzroy. Both ships were abandoned. The *Sir Galahad*, which had a large number of men on board, was burnt out. 50 men lost their lives, of whom 32 were from the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards. The courageous efforts of the helicopter pilots and rescue boat crews, who took their craft again and again into the flames and blinding smoke rising from the stricken vessel, prevented greater loss of life. But for the bravery of the seamen and the dedication of all those who assisted ashore the loss of life would have been much greater. Later that day a pair of patrolling Sea Harriers destroyed four Mirages over Choiseul Sound.

Advance on Port Stanley

125. Despite previous set-backs through loss of men and equipment, particularly helicopters, the first phase of the main battle for Port Stanley began on 11/12 June when 3 Cdo Bde mounted a three battalion night attack. Simultaneously targets further to the east were bombarded by Naval vessels. As a result of vigorous and aggressive patrolling the troops were able to achieve initial surprise, and after a night of stiff fighting 3 PARA took Mount Longdon, 45 Cdo captured Two Sisters, and 42 Cdo captured Mount Harriet. British casualties were 22 killed and 44 wounded. Throughout the following day, all these positions came under considerable enemy artillery fire, causing more casualties. The shelling was not, however, all one way: the Argentine defences were heavily bombarded by our own artillery and at night by Naval guns.

126. During the night of 11/12 June HMS *Glamorgan* was withdrawing from a bombardment of shore positions around Port Stanley when she was hit by a shore-launched Exocet missile. Her company extinguished severe fires and the ship continued to be available for action. 13 men died. It was the last direct attack on a British ship in the Campaign.

127. The second phase took place on the night of 13/14 June. In the north, in another superbly executed night attack, 2 PARA captured Wireless Ridge. Further south the Scots Guards had a hard fight to capture Tumbledown Mountain from a regular Argentine Marine battalion whose heavily defended machine gun emplacements put up fierce resistance for a number of hours. The Scots Guards secured their objectives and the Gurkhas moved through to take Mount William to the south-east. In this final phase we lost 20 men.

128. Large numbers of the enemy abandoned their positions, discarded their weapons and stood around disconsolately. British troops followed up to the edge of Port Stanley where they were ordered to halt and fire only in self defence, to avoid fighting in the town and among the civilian population. Soon afterwards white flags were reported over Stanley and General Moore accepted the Argentine surrender.

Chronology

- 2 April Argentina invades the Falkland Islands.
- 3 April Argentina invades South Georgia; UN passes Security Council Resolution 502; first RAF transport aircraft deploy to Ascension Island.
- 5 April First task force ships sail from the United Kingdom.
- 12 April 200 mile maritime exclusion zone comes into effect.
- 23 April The Government warns Argentina that any approach by Argentine warships or military aircraft which could amount to a threat to the task force would be dealt with appropriately.
- 25 April British Forces recapture South Georgia; submarine *Santa Fé* attacked and disabled.
- 30 April Total exclusion zone comes into effect.
- 1 May First attack on Falklands by Vulcan, Sea Harriers and warships; first Argentine aircraft shot down.
- 2 May *General Belgrano* sunk by HMS *Conqueror*.
- 4 May HMS *Sheffield* hit by Exocet missile; later sinks.
- 7 May The Government warns Argentina that any Argentine warships and military aircraft over 12 miles from the Argentine coast would be regarded as hostile and liable to be dealt with accordingly.
- 9 May Two Sea Harriers sink trawler, *Narwal*, which had been shadowing task force.
- 11 May HMS *Alacrity* sinks store ship *Cabo de los Estados* in Falkland Sound.
- 14/15 May Special Forces night raid on Pebble Island; 11 Argentine aircraft destroyed on the ground.
- 21 May 3 Cdo Bde establish beach-head at San Carlos; HMS *Ardent* lost; some 15 Argentine aircraft destroyed.